

Personal account of being involved in prostitution From Angel, July 2009

"I'm not yet 30 years old, from a middle class background, successful academically, and never dreamed I'd end up in prostitution. Now here I am, 2 years after I exited it and still suffering its aftermath, every day.

It kills me inside when people talk about prostitution being a 'choice', or 'empowering', or 'harmless fun' for women. Those words don't even belong in the same sentence. In my experience, prostitution was the end result of addiction, self hatred, and years of extreme physical and sexual abuse by my ex-partner which left me feeling I deserved nothing more.

If you're told over and over that you're a wh**e, a sl*g, a c**t, a stupid f***ing b**ch, and then made to do stuff that fills you with shame, you start to believe it. If you're cut off from other people and their perspectives, and told not to trust them, and forced to rely on the person who abuses you, and gives other men access to abuse you, so that the hand that hits you and hurts you is also the hand that feeds you, and mops you up (sometimes) you get confused, what you are told and what happens to you are two different things and you lose the language, the words, to ask for help. You think you're going mad.

2 years on, and the shame still gets in the way. 2 years on, and I still find it hard to verbalise what happened to me, what was done to me, and what I was made to do, because it makes me sick, and frankly, I'm scared that other people will feel the same. I do therapy, I'm clean and sober now, and it's 2 years on and I still struggle.

I moved a long way away to get away from my partner, before it got so bad, I left the area I'd lived since I was a young girl, but he still showed up on my doorstep and stayed for the next 2 and a half years. There was no point at which I can say, looking back, 'this was when I should have left' or 'that was when it really turned bad' – it was a slippery slope, a slow, insidious slide into hell. First it was verbal, then a progression of physical incidents, and the sexual all tangled up with both.

Pornography was involved, first as a teaching aide, and later, I was made to be in it, photos and videos. Other men were involved, too, taking pictures, using me, laughing at me, hurting me, and laughing some more if I responded. I'd shake and vomit before, shake and vomit after, sometimes pass out with pain. They acted worse as a group. My partner's addiction meant he needed drugs, needed money, and my body was a pathway to both. The word 'pimp' wasn't in my vocabulary, though looking back I see that's what he was, but I'd loved him very much at one time, I was an addict myself, I was scared and confused and in and out of blackout, in a world I hadn't even known had existed.

My addictions were various – primarily alcohol, but with sleepers, coke, cutting [self-harming], and painkillers all thrown in for good measure. Things were difficult at home so I didn't have any

support there to fall back on. When I finally managed to crawl away from my partner, I was a mess. I didn't trust anyone, especially men, had constant nightmares and flashbacks to the abuse, which were triggered by scents, sounds, groups, foods... life was terrifying. My addiction and mental state meant I wasn't fit to work. I was totally f**ed up, in pieces, and I knew it. I felt ruined, worthless and beyond redemption (I still battle with those feelings). So when I saw an ad in the local paper advertising escorts, I felt it was inevitable.

Life as an escort isn't the glamorous, well paid life you read about in womens' magazines. Put bluntly, it's being paid to be f**ed, and because they've paid, johns [punters] are going to get their money's worth, they expect you to do anything and everything, whatever turns them on. It was frightening – you didn't know what you were turning up to. The owner, an ex-escort herself, could be pretty nasty if you weren't pulling your weight. She taught us to be extremely careful with what we'd say to clients on the 'phone, in case it was the police – officially, we sold time, not sex. We all started off in debt because we had to pay for sleazy semi-nude pictures to go on the website. I was scared someone I knew would see my pictures online.

I had a really sordid experience with one client which made me quit. I cried in front of him while he was abusing me which I was so mad at myself for. He loved it, loved that I'd cried, and called me on my mobile incessantly over the next few days... I was in pieces because this man who'd hurt me wouldn't leave me alone and because he'd paid me it felt like I shouldn't have minded, should just get on with it, I could hear my ex-partner's voice saying 'you stupid f**ng b**ch, you stupid f**ng b**ch, you deserved it' I couldn't eat couldn't sleep couldn't cope, told him in the end I'd call the police if he ever called again and changed my mobile. The experience stayed with me.

I still had the addiction, still needed the money, was still f**ed up, more f**ed up, so I figured a massage parlour would be safer, not as well paid but safer, 2 women there at least, it must be safer, surely. I started working there, kept the same working name, 'Angel', got told what to say what not to say, what you could charge, what cut the house kept, how to keep the johns coming back, you hate them they hate you they hurt you but you have to keep them coming back for the money it's all about the money, the money and your self-hatred or why else would you be there.

On the 'phone: 'Angel is working today, she's 21 years old, 5'6", long dark hair, 36G and looking for a good time' as if. You change your age to suit, though not too young or they treat you worse [as] they like the idea of breaking some girl in. You offer extras, the basic is just £45 for full sex and a blow job and the house keeps £15 of that, you don't earn much if you don't do extras, even if you see 8 or more clients in a day, which I do. I give longer blowjobs to shorten the time I get f**ed for, my mouth tastes of condoms constantly. Extras include watersports, toy shows, 2 girl shows, domination, anal, or a foursome. Anal, being the most painful, is best paid, most in demand, worst to do.

I don't do it, I managed to get out of there into rehab before it comes to that, not all the women are as lucky, as far as I know they still work there or someplace else, someplace worse because as time goes by and your addiction worsens and your self-hatred worsens, you break through boundaries, do stuff you promised yourself you'd never do, that no one should ever have to do, just to make ends meet.

At its height, my cocaine habit cost me £1000 a week. I slept with the dealer, he owned an escort agency, talked of using trafficked women from poor European countries, showed me pornographic pictures of 'his girls'.

I am one of the lucky ones, I got out, got clean, got sober, got therapy. I still struggle. It's been 2 years, I still get nightmares, still get flashbacks, still get triggered, still struggle with food and with body image and with men. I still struggle with finding the words and reaching out to talk with people about what I've been through. I struggle with knowing that the women I was alongside are still stuck there, still being hurt, I go past the place I used to work sometimes and it hurts me. They all had similar stories to mine – addiction or abuse.

When I see all over the media the message that sex work is fun and ok, it hurts me. Being a prostitute is being hurt and hurt and hurt again and being told you like it, you deserve it, and you should lighten up and enjoy it and maybe laugh about it like they do in Friends or Diary of a Call Girl on the tv, it's always fun, always light, always a choice, a witty anecdote, entertainment. When I was working, I had to say I enjoyed it and that I chose it – it's what the johns want to hear, and as a prostitute I existed for their pleasure, my body and words were there for their pleasure. The real me was effectively mute. It makes sense to target the johns and criminalise them, because they hold the money and they have all the power. Demand change”.

All names have been changed

www.demandchange.org.uk